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Key Points:

- Identified a leftward shift in the region of maximum ocean cooling under the inner core of a storm that rapidly intensified over the shelf
- Depth-dependent thermodynamics of the shelf and the storm-driven coastal circulation drove the spatial structure of ocean temperatures
- The intensification of Hurricane Sally highlights key differences in storm-ocean interactions between shelf and open ocean

Abstract

Prediction of rapid intensification in tropical cyclones prior to landfall is a major societal issue. While air-sea interactions are clearly linked to storm intensity, the connections between the underlying thermal conditions over continental shelves and rapid intensification are limited. Here, an exceptional set of in-situ and satellite data are used to identify spatial heterogeneity in sea surface temperatures across the inner core of Hurricane Sally (2020), a storm that rapidly intensified over the shelf. A leftward shift in the region of maximum cooling was observed as the hurricane transited from the open gulf to the shelf. This shift was generated, in part, by the surface heat flux in conjunction the along and across-shelf transport of heat from storm-generated coastal circulation. The spatial differences in the sea surface temperatures were large enough to potentially influence rapid intensification processes suggesting that coastal thermal features need to be accounted for to improve storm forecasting as well as to better understand how climate change will modify interactions between tropical cyclones and the coastal ocean.

Plain Language Summary

Prediction of rapid intensification in tropical cyclones prior to landfall is a major societal issue because of the destructive potential that such storm present. The interaction between the surface of the ocean and the atmosphere are clearly linked to storm intensity. However, the connections between the underlying thermal energy that powers tropical cyclones and rapid intensification of storms over continental shelves are limited. Here, an exceptional set of data collected

in the field during the storm as well as from space using satellites was used to identify spatial variations in sea surface temperatures across the inner core of Hurricane Sally (2020), a storm that rapidly intensified over the shelf. A leftward shift in the region of maximum cooling was observed as the hurricane transited from the open gulf to the shelf. This change was due to the heat loss from the surface of the ocean as well as heat transport by shelf currents. The spatial differences were large enough to potentially influence how quickly storms can intensify suggesting that coastal thermal features need to be accounted for to improve storm forecasting as well as to better understand how climate change will modify interactions between tropical cyclones and the coastal ocean.

1 Introduction

Exposure to hazards from tropical cyclones is a major stressor on natural and anthropogenic systems in coastal regions across the globe. The severity of hazards that accompany tropical cyclones, e.g., wind speed, storm surge, flash flood; disproportionality increase with more intense storm events (Freeman and Warner, 2001; Zhai and Jiang, 2014). A key element in the formation of major storms (Category 3 to 5) is rapid intensification (defined as a rate of wind increase of >25 knots over 24 h), with $\sim 79\%$ of the storms undergoing this intensification process in their life cycles (Lee et al. 2016). Nonetheless, forecasting rapid intensification remains challenging (Kaplan et al., 2010; DeMaria et al., 2014).

This limitation is particularly concerning given the findings of recent studies. Bhatia et al. (2019) provided evidence of an increase of intensification rates in the Atlantic basin stemming, in part, from anthropogenic forcing and (Chu et al., 2020) projected a 150% increase in the major storms expected to impact the coastal ocean under a CO_2 doubling scenario. These findings suggest an increasing importance of rapid intensification for coastal storm forecasting. More directly, Emanuel (2017) found that rapid intensification prior to landfall is expected to be much more common in a warmer future climate. Such expectations are consistent with a number of recent studies that have showed that the shelf region can support significant intensification given the right conditions (e.g., Seroka et al., 2016; Potter et al., 2019; Zhang et al., 2019; Dzwonkowski et al., 2020; Cheriton et al., 2021). In fact, Pun et al. (2019) found that nearshore waters <30 m deep likely played a critical role in the rapid intensification of Typhoon Hato (2017) prior to landfall.

Consequently, understanding the shelf conditions and complex feedbacks that favor rapid intensification are of critical importance to coastal communities. The fortuitous path of Hurricane Sally (2020), which bisected four monitoring stations in the Mississippi Bight of the northern Gulf of Mexico (Fig. 1), provided an exceptional observational perspective of a storm system that underwent rapid intensification over the shelf. The stations were well within a 100 km of the storm center, a region where enthalpy fluxes are critical to storm intensity (Miyamoto and Takemi, 2010). This provided a unique perspective on the coastal ocean response to a storm event as well as evidence of the potential

importance that shelf temperature heterogeneity could have on storm intensification prior to landfall. This perspective of Hurricane Sally is particularly important as the shelf behavior of this tropical cyclone was not well forecasted (Berg and Reinhart, 2021), representing a case study that provides critical insight for improving the understanding of processes that tropical cyclone models may not be correctly resolving (Seroke et al., 2017).

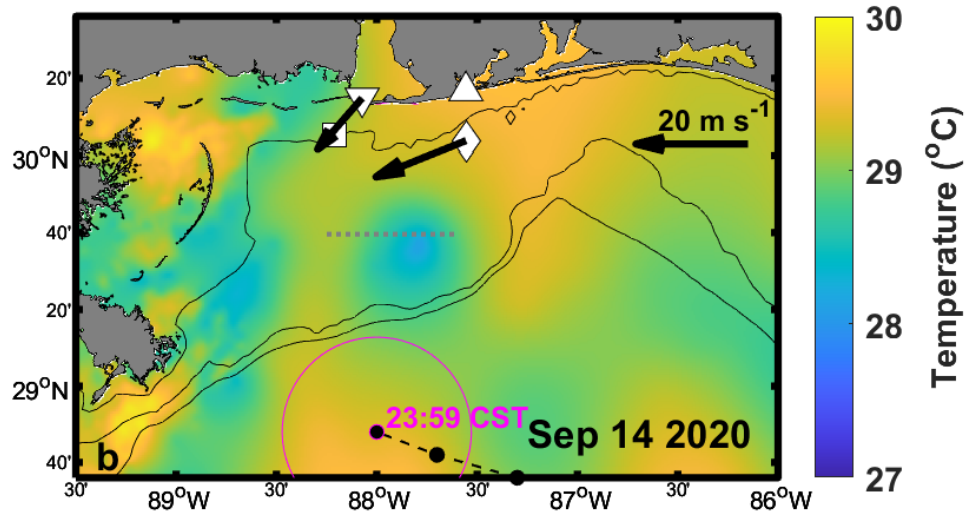


Fig. 1: Sea surface temperature evolution. Map of the Mississippi Bight showing the evolution of the sea surface temperature and coastal wind conditions (black arrows) during the transit of Hurricane Sally (2020) on September 13 (**a**: prior to the storm arrival) and 14-16 (**b-d**). (**a**) shows the monitoring stations including DI (Dauphin Island,), ORB (Orange Beach,), CP (FOCAL/CP,), and PP (Perdido Pass,) as well as the locations of the Mississippi (MS) River Delta and Mobile Bay, with the inset showing the study region in context of the broader Gulf of Mexico as well as the full track of Hurricane Sally. Hydrographic data were available at all 4 stations while meteorological data was only available at DI and ORB. Thin black lines indicate selected isobaths showing the approximate location of the shelf break (100-200 m) as well as a depth (20 m) near the shelf monitoring stations. (**b-d**) show the track of Hurricane Sally (dashed line) with the circles indicating locations during the stated day at 6-h intervals; and the radius of maximum intensity (magenta circle) at selected

times (black circle with magenta edge) as well as the period of rapid intensification over the shelf (**c**, magenta line). On September 16 (**d**), the approximate time of landfall is also provided. The wind vectors are hourly values at 12:00 CST in (**a-c**) and 03:00 CST in (**d**). Note the winds are in oceanographic convention showing the direction the winds were blowing to and the velocity scale size (right corner) changes in (**c**) and (**d**). In (**b**), the horizontal grey dashed line indicates the approximate location of the bottom front of the downwelling event determined by the advection of the 28.5°C isotherm from September 9-14 as described in (19).

2 Materials and Methods

The data sources, processing, and analysis follow similar methods as those in (Dzwonkowski et al., 2018; Dzwonkowski et al., 2020) and most of the specific details from this particular time period have been described in (Dzwonkowski et al., 2021). As such, only a brief overview of the data sets is provided here with a focus on the additional data sources used in this work.

2.1 Tropical cyclone data

Data for Hurricane Sally were acquired from the best track file as provided by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) National Hurricane Center (<ftp://ftp.nhc.noaa.gov/atcf/btk/>). The transitional speed of Hurricane Sally was determined using the distance from the center positions and the associated 6-h intervals. The resulting speeds were interpolated to the original time step. Here, the inner core of Hurricane Sally is defined as the radius of maximum wind provided in the data file.

2.2 In-situ data and associated analysis

To understand the atmospheric and oceanic conditions during the shelf transit of Hurricane Sally, field and reanalysis data from various sources were obtained. Standard meteorological data from two NOAA National Data Buoy Center (NDBC) stations were used (Fig. 1): buoy station 42012 offshore of Orange Beach, AL (ORB) and DPIA1 (DI) on Dauphin Island, AL. The meteorological data included air temperature, relative humidity/dew point temperature (ORB only), and wind speed and direction. These stations were the closest measurements available to the main mooring site (CP). In addition, incoming solar radiation and relative humidity/dew point temperature data from the Dauphin Island station of the Alabama Real-time Coastal Observing system were obtained. This site is less than 500 m away from DPIA1, and both sites are collectively referred to as site DI for this study (Fig. 1). Additional data for key atmospheric variables, including solar radiation and long-wave radiation, were obtained from the National Centers for Environmental Prediction (NCEP) North American Region Reanalysis (NARR) for the grid cell closest to sites DI and ORB. Existing methods were used to determine estimates for surface heat flux terms (e.g. Fairall et al., 1996) and the associated temperature tendency budget (e.g., Moisan and Niiler, 1998).

The hydrographic and current velocity data were derived from a long-term mooring station (site CP) on the 20 m isobath to the west-southwest of Mobile Bay (Fig. 1). Site CP consisted of two CTD instruments that measured temperature and salinity at the bottom and near-surface, 6 thermistors throughout the water column that measured thermal structure and a 600 kHz Nortek Acoustic Doppler Waves and Current profiler (AWAC) that measured current velocity data throughout the water column. In addition to this site, three other monitoring stations collected data during the passage of Hurricane Sally: sites DI, ORB, and Perdido Pass (PP) in Fig. 1. Site PP provided near bottom hydrographic data in ~ 3 m of water at the mouth of Perdido Bay, similar to site DI. A calibration error was identified in the raw temperature data at site DI and corrected by 1°C (Fig. S1), the offset identified during the instrument swap on August 28.

These four stations were grouped into coastal sites with typical water column depths of ~ 3 m (DI and PP) and shelf sites with depths of 20 and 21.5 m (CP and ORB, respectively). Data from site CP (Figs. 3a and S2b) showed that the inner/mid-shelf conditions were uniform for several days prior to the arrival of Hurricane Sally suggesting that the hydrographic conditions at other monitoring sites were similarly homogeneous and the associated temperature data during the time between September 13 and landfall (September 16, 04:00 CST) can be considered as depth-average values. Thus, the observed temperature changes were interpreted as changes in the depth-average temperature at these stations. Finally, relative water levels at sites DI and PP were determined by subtracting the broader study period mean (August 13-September 20 from Dzwonkoski et al. (2021)) from site DI and adjusting site PP to match the de-meaned pre-storm conditions at site DI.

2.3 Satellite-derived sea surface temperature data

Sea surface temperature data were obtained from the Jet Propulsion Laboratory (JPL) Multi-scale Ultra-high Resolution (MUR) sea surface temperature product (<https://podaac.jpl.nasa.gov/dataset/MUR-JPL-L4-GLOB-v4.1>). This is a daily 1-km resolution product that blends 1-km infrared sensor data and 25-km microwave sensor data. While this product is gap free, it is expected that the extensive cloud cover during the shelf crossing of Hurricane Sally severely limited the contribution of high-resolution data to this data product over the study period, likely limiting the quality of the data near the coastline. In addition, the daily resolution is expected to under sample the evolution of the temperature structure during shelf crossing of Hurricane Sally, which occurred over a period on the order of a day. Despite these limitations, the MUR sea surface temperature data compared well to the in-situ data shelf sites (CP and ORB) and were used to provide a broad regional picture of the conditions during the period of interest as well as a first-order estimate of the shelf thermal changes in response to Hurricane Sally. The surface temperature of the inner core of Hurricane Sally was determined using the values within the radius of maximum wind at the 6-h intervals of the best track storm data on a given day.

3 Results

3.1 Evolution of Hurricane Sally

Hurricane Sally experienced two periods of rapid intensification. The first occurred over the deep Gulf of Mexico outside the study region early on September 14 (Figs. 1b and 2a). As the day progressed the storm began to interact with the shelf more directly as the radius of maximum wind neared the shelf break. Wind speed at the monitoring stations notably increased from $6\text{--}12\text{ m s}^{-1}$ on September 13 to $12\text{--}17\text{ m s}^{-1}$ on September 14 (Fig. 1a,b). Despite the storm moving very slowly (Fig. 2c: $5\text{--}9\text{ km h}^{-1}$), the sea surface temperature conditions in the inner core of the storm remained favorable for intensification with values $\sim 29.3^\circ\text{C}$ (Fig. 2b) and the storm intensity was generally steady during the following 24 h. Storm intensification resumed on September 15 as the center of the storm crossed the shelf break, increasing from 130 km h^{-1} at 12:00 CST to 176 km h^{-1} at 24:00 CST. This period of rapid intensification began at a time when shelf temperatures were decreasing with both satellite-derived inner core temperatures and in-situ shelf temperatures dropping below 28.5°C (Figs. 2b and 3a), a value that has been statistically associated with rapid intensification (Kaplan and DeMaria, 2003). However, the thermal conditions generally stayed around 28°C over the shelf until landfall. Here again, the translational speed of the storm from the shelf break to landfall was relatively slow, only exceeding 10 km h^{-1} in the hours just before landfall (Fig. 2c).

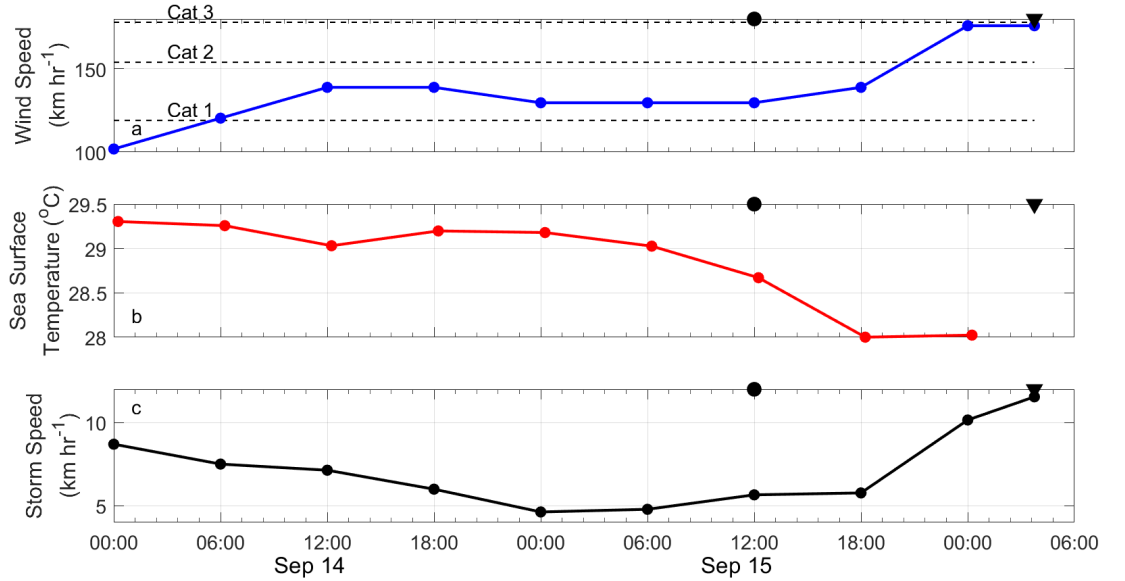


Fig. 2: Times series following Hurricane Sally Time series of (a) the maximum wind speed of Hurricane Sally, (b) the average sea surface temperature from the inner core using the MUR sea temperature product, and (c) the

translational speed of Hurricane Sally. In (a), Saffir-Simpson wind speeds for storm categories 1-3 (Cat 1-3) are indicated by the horizontal black dashed lines. The times when the center of the storm reaches the shelf break () and makes land fall () are marked on the top edge of the plots.

3.2 Evolution of sea surface temperature

Given the known importance of ocean temperature on storm intensity, the evolution of the shelf sea surface temperature conditions provided an important context for the observed air-sea interaction during the transit of Hurricane Sally over the shelf (Fig. 1). Prior to the arrival of Hurricane Sally in the Mississippi Bight (September 13), the sea surface temperature conditions were generally $\sim 29.3^{\circ}\text{C}$ with pockets of slightly warmer and cooler water throughout the region. These small deviations became enhanced as the storm approached the shelf on September 14 (Fig. 1b). There was notable cooling to the northeast of the storm track over the deep Gulf of Mexico that extended onto the shelf break. Even with this development of heterogeneity in the sea surface temperatures, the shelf was still generally above 28.5°C , consistent with an analysis of pre-storm thermal conditions by (19) which estimated the foot of a downwelling front (using 28.5°C isotherm) to have crossed much of the shelf (Fig. 1b: grey dashed line). As the storm transited to the shelf on September 15, the sea surface temperature cooling broadened across the region with maximum decreases generally directly under and to the left of the storm track. Nonetheless, a triangular patch of water with sea surface temperature of $\sim 28.5^{\circ}\text{C}$ was maintained while the storm crossed the shelf. Finally, the shelf around the storm track was homogeneously cooled to $<28^{\circ}\text{C}$ with the storm making landfall and tracking well inland of the coast on September 16.

3.3 Thermal evolution of the shelf and coastal stations

A similar temperature evolution was observed in the monitoring stations (Fig. 3a). Consistent with the satellite-derived sea surface temperature, the in-situ temperatures at the shelf stations were generally $\sim 29.3^{\circ}\text{C}$ on September 13. The direct impact of Hurricane Sally on the coastal ocean became apparent on September 14 as the wind conditions increased (Fig. 1a,b) and the temperatures began a near simultaneous decrease. Both shelf sites (CP and ORB) had similar temperature tendencies through the first 1.5 d of this decline period (Fig. 3a). The temperature behavior at these two sites began to diverge ~ 16 h prior to landfall as Hurricane Sally moved northward over the shelf (September 15, 12:00 CST). At this point, the temperature decrease slowed at ORB and became warmer than that at site CP. By landfall, site ORB had cooled by $\sim 1.0^{\circ}\text{C}$ compared to $\sim 1.6^{\circ}\text{C}$ at CP. This east-west temperature gradient, with relatively colder conditions to the left of the storm track, was consistent with the satellite-derived sea surface temperature data.

The temperature tendencies at the coastal stations experienced a clear separation from the shelf conditions with much faster cooling rates. As a result, coastal temperatures reached values of $25\text{-}26^{\circ}\text{C}$ prior to landfall. Similar to the

shelf sites, there was a notable deviation in the cooling rates between sites just prior to landfall, with the rate at site DI (left of the storm center) higher than that at site PP (right of the storm center). Comparing the coastal and shelf stations, there was also a notable north-south gradient that was not captured in satellite-derived sea surface temperature data. Despite this near-shore limitation in the satellite-derived sea surface temperature data, the broader shelf patterns were consistent with in-situ data at the shelf sites.

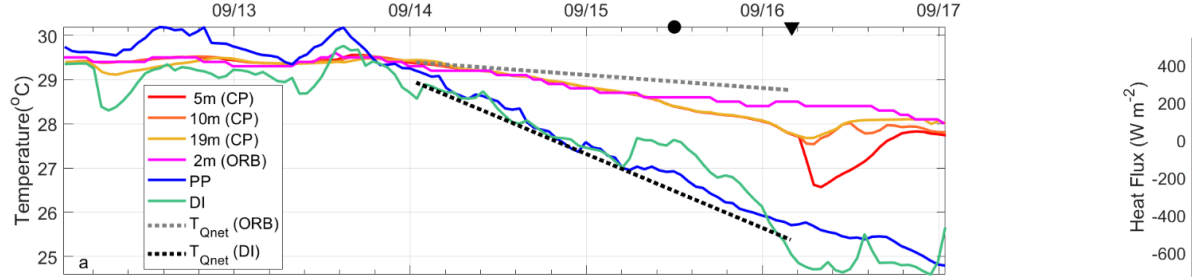


Fig. 3: Times series from monitor stations. Time series of (a) water temperature at the monitoring sites, (b) surface heat flux Q_{net} at ORB and DI, (c) along-shelf currents at site CP, (d) across-shelf currents at site CP. In (b), the dotted horizontal lines indicate the average surface heat flux from September 14 to landfall on September 16 at DI (black) and ORB (grey). Note the dashed line (magenta) indicates surface flux estimates at ORB using the relative humidity from DI. In (c,d), the black contours indicate velocity intervals of 25 and 10 cm s^{-1} , respectively, with the thick line being 0 cm s^{-1} . East/westward and north/south currents are shown with positive/negative values, respectively. Note that the coloration in (c) is not symmetric with respect to positive/negative values. The times when the center of Hurricane Sally reaches the shelf break () and makes land fall () are marked on the top edge of the plots.

3.4 Heat budget analysis

To further investigate the thermal response of the coastal ocean during this cooling period between September 14-16, simplified heat budgets for DI and ORB were estimated. The simplest heat budget for the temperature tendency in a well-mixed water column can be represented as:

$$\frac{\partial \bar{T}}{\partial t} = \frac{Q_{net}}{\rho_o c_p h} = \frac{Q_{sw} + Q_b + Q_e + Q_h}{\rho_o c_p h} \quad (1)$$

where \bar{T} is the depth-average temperature, Q_{net} is the total surface heat flux, ρ_o is the depth-average density, c_p is the heat capacity of seawater, h is the water depth, Q_{sw} is the shortwave heat flux, Q_b is the net longwave heat flux, Q_e is the latent heat flux, and Q_h is the sensible heat flux. The individual heat flux (Fig. S2) indicated that Q_e was the dominant term during this period with values typically $\sim 250 \text{ W m}^{-2}$. Similarly, Q_{net} for both sites showed outward fluxes $\sim 300 \text{ W m}^{-2}$ (Fig. 3B).

To get a first-order estimate of the importance of the surface heat flux, Q_{net} averaged over this period was used to estimate the expected rate of temperature change solely from the surface heat flux. For site DI, a water depth of 3.5 m (i.e., mean site depth plus the average surge over the event period) and an average outward Q_{net} of 278 W m^{-2} (Fig. 3b: blacked dashed line) resulted in a temperature decrease of $0.070^\circ\text{C h}^{-1}$. This rate was then used to project the temperature change over the period of decline for the coastal stations (Fig. 3a: blacked dashed line). For site ORB, an estimate using a water depth of 21.5 m (i.e., mean depth) and an average outward Q_{net} of 301 W m^{-2} (Fig. 3b: grey dashed line) yielded a temperature decrease of $0.012^\circ\text{C h}^{-1}$ from which the temperature change was also projected over this time period for the shelf sites (Fig. 3a: grey dashed line). In the case of the coastal stations, this surface flux-based temperature tendency was very close to the observed temperature tendency of $\sim 0.071^\circ\text{C h}^{-1}$ (i.e., $\sim 3.7^\circ\text{C}$ in 52 h) and generally well represented the coastal temperature decline. By comparison, the shelf stations surface flux-based tendency had a larger difference with the observed tendency being $\sim 0.019^\circ\text{C h}^{-1}$ (i.e., 1.0°C in 52 h), higher by a factor of ~ 1.6 .

While Eq. 1 was surprisingly effective in capturing the order of magnitude change at both coastal and shelf stations, station to station changes in the temperature declines became increasingly apparent as the storm crossed the shelf. The stations westward (left) of the storm center decreased more rapidly than those eastward (right) suggesting coastal circulation may have had a significant role in the temperature budget. The arrangement of stations allow for a first-order estimate of the advective components at CP, i.e., $\bar{u} \frac{\bar{T}_{al}}{x}$ and $\bar{v} \frac{\bar{T}_{ac}}{y}$ where \bar{u} is the depth-average along-shelf velocity, \bar{v} is the depth-average across-shelf velocity, \bar{T}_{al} is the along-shelf temperature difference between sites CP and ORB, \bar{T}_{ac} is the across-shelf temperature difference between sites CP and DI, Δx is the distance between sites CP and ORB, and Δy is the distance between sites CP and DI. At the onset of the temperature decline, both terms were relatively small (Fig. 4a). The along-shelf advection had virtually no flux from September 14, 01:00 CST to September 15, 12:00 CST due to the lack of an along-shelf temperature gradient between CP and ORB (Fig. 3a). Over this period, the across-shelf advection term had a weak diurnal pattern associated with oscillatory currents that were modulated by a low frequency onshore flow coincident with the rising on water level at the coast (Figs. 3d and S1c).

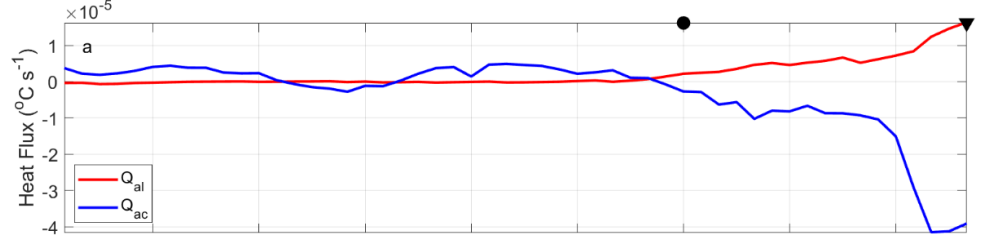


Fig. 4: Times series of thermal conditions. Time series of the (a) advective heat flux components and (b) cumulative contributions of the terms on the right hand side of the simplified temperature budget for site CP (Eq. 1) during the period of decreasing temperature tendency prior to the landfall of Hurricane Sally (September 14-15) including the along and across-shelf heat fluxes (T_{al} and T_{ac} , respectively) as well as the contribution from the temporal average surface heat flux derived at ORB ($T_{Q_{surface}}$). The observed temperature change at the shelf sites over this time period was $O(1.4^{\circ}\text{C})$. The times when the center of Hurricane Sally reaches the shelf break () and makes land fall () are marked on the top edge of the plots.

As the storm transited to the shelf (September 15, 12:00 CST to September 16, 03:45 CST), the advection terms increased in magnitude in response to the cyclonic wind forcing (Fig. 3c). Very strong westward along-shelf flow amplified the small but growing temperature difference between CP and ORB and provided a positive heat flux to the site CP. In contrast, the strong across-shelf flow transported cooler, shallow water offshore driving a negative heat flux to the site CP. The across-shelf advection term was quite similar in magnitude during the majority of the shelf crossing, $O(10^{-5}\text{C s}^{-1})$. However, in the hours before landfall, the magnitude of the across-shelf term increased faster than that of the along-shelf term, eventually exceeding the along-shelf values by more than double. The cumulative impact of these advective heat fluxes was the same order of magnitude, producing temperature changes of 0.4 and -0.6°C for the along-shelf and across-shelf contributions, respectively. These advective contributions to the temperature change at site CP and the changes driven by the surface fluxes calculated at ORB combined to result in a total temperature change of $\sim 0.9^{\circ}\text{C}$ (Fig. 4b, summing the cumulative temperature values at landfall, September 16 3:45 CST). While this value underrepresents the observed change at site CP ($\Delta T \sim 1.4^{\circ}\text{C}$) by $\sim 36\%$, the result still provides a rare observational, first order perspective of the processes driving the temperature change at the site.

4 Discussion

4.1 Shift in the region of maximum cooling

While average sea surface temperatures under the inner core of Hurricane Sally

were generally warm (Fig. 2b), the evolution of the shelf conditions presented complex patterns that have the potential to impact air-sea interactions prior to landfall. As highlighted by satellite-derived sea surface temperature data on September 14-15, there was a growing east-to-west gradient with warm-to-cool thermal conditions where the storm transited to the shelf (Fig. 1b,c). The sea surface temperature structure was counter to the well-established rightward bias in cooling that is typically observed in the open ocean in the northern hemisphere (Price, 1981; Stramma et al., 1986; D’Asaro et al., 2007; Sanabia and Jayne, 2020; Zhang et al., 2021; Ma et al., 2021). This coastal transition to a leftward bias in the location of maximum cooling has been documented in a limited number of other studies on ocean-tropical cyclone interactions in the Bay of Bengal using largely modeling outputs and satellite-derived sea surface temperature data (Mahapatra et al., 2007; Das et al., 2017; Mandal et al., 2018; Chacko and Zimik, 2018). However, to the authors’ knowledge, this is the first study to provide in-situ evidence of such behavior across the inner core of a storm.

Such a shift in thermal patterns may not be trivial as recent modeling studies on rapid intensification indicate the structuring of sea surface temperature gradients under a storm as well as inner core cooling as small as $0.3\text{--}0.4^\circ\text{C}$ influenced storm intensity changes (Kanada et al., 2017; Zhang et al., 2020). In-situ data used in this study indicate a temperature difference of $\sim 0.6^\circ\text{C}$ around the radius of maximum wind on September 16, 00:00 CST just prior to landfall. Interestingly, despite the notable spatial variability in the sea surface temperature field, the storm was able to rapidly intensify over the shelf. This may be due to the fact that the initial conditions on the shelf were exceedingly warm ($<28.5^\circ\text{C}$) so that in spite of the growing spatial variability, shelf conditions remained largely above 28.0°C on September 15 (Fig. 1c) as did the average inner core sea surface temperature (Fig. 2b).

4.2 Role of shelf bathymetry for thermal structuring

The processes driving this coastal response are, in part, directly related to the interplay of the storm forcing with coastal bathymetry. At the onset of the shelf temperature decline on September 14, differential cooling between the shallow coastal stations and deeper shelf stations played a critical role in generating an across-shelf temperature gradient as coastal and shelf sites with different depths had similar surface heat fluxes. Differences in the along-shelf temperature changes at the shelf stations became apparent over the course of September 15-16 (Fig. 3a), when the cyclonic rotation in the wind field became more intensified with rapidly increasing east to southeast wind at site ORB and an increasing north wind at site DI (Fig. 1c,d). Given that the inner core of the storm moved across the shelf faster than the timescale for geostrophic adjustment (i.e., ~ 16 h to cross the shelf compared to a ~ 24 h inertial time scale), the coastal circulation would be expected to follow the wind forcing with northward flow at site ORB and southward flow at site CP based on previous studies of coastal responses to storms (e.g., Keen and Glenn, 1999; Mahapatra et al.,

2007).

Such circulation patterns were consistent with the temperature tendency at sites CP and ORB as well as the velocity structure at site CP (Fig. 3). Onshore transport of deeper warmer water on the eastern side of the storm would be expected to slow the cooling rate as observed at site ORB, while offshore transport of cooler, shallower water on the western side of the storm would be expected to increase the rate of temperature decline as observed at site CP. Incredibly, site ORB experienced almost no cooling in the final hours before landfall despite encountering peak storm conditions as the eye wall passed over this region. This is consistent with the advection of warm offshore and/or eastward water arresting the cooling to the east of the storm center and limiting the ahead-of-eye cooling. Thus, the interaction between the depth-dependent thermodynamics of the water column and the storm-driven coastal circulation contributed to the observed temperature dipole across the shelf.

5 Conclusions

While the duration of time that tropical cyclones spend over shelf regions of the ocean is typically short, relative to their overall life span, significant changes in the storm characteristics can occur. The results of this study highlight the complex interactions between the storm forcing (e.g., track and intensity) and the coastal environment (initial hydrographic conditions and system bathymetry). Importantly, these coastal ocean-storm interactions over the shelf may be very different compared to those in the open ocean. This case study of Hurricane Sally highlights several such differences. In contrast to typical open ocean responses where maximum cooling occurs on the right side of storms in the northern hemisphere, the coastal response of Hurricane Sally demonstrated a leftward bias in the Mississippi Bight. Such horizontal spatial structure across the inner core of a tropical cyclone could impact the dynamic processes driving rapid intensification. A better understanding of the frequency of the observed spatial features as well as their potential importance requires further research but is critical for accurate storm forecasting. Given that in-situ data on coastal water column structure during storm events are likely to remain sparse, improving the understanding of the available satellite-derived sea surface temperature patterns may be useful for forecasting shelf intensification of tropical cyclones.

More importantly, this event exhibits characteristics that typically limit the potential for intensification in the open ocean. First, the shallow nature of the shelf environment constrained the magnitude of tropical cyclonic heat potential, $O(20\text{-}40 \text{ kJ cm}^{-2})$, well below the value of 60 kJ cm^{-2} typically associated with intensification in the open ocean (Mainelli et al., 2008). These observations are consistent with the growing body of literature that highlights the fact that tropical cyclonic heat potential does not properly represent the role that shelf conditions exert on storm strength (e.g., Price, 2009; Potter et al. 2019). Second, Hurricane Sally had a slow translational speed as it crossed the shelf. Slow moving storms in the open ocean are typically associated with attenuation due to the cooler sea surface temperatures driven by mixing and upwelling from

prolonged exposure to the storm conditions (e.g., Price, 1918; Lloyd and Vecchi, 2011; Vincent et al., 2012; Walker et al., 2014; Zhang et al., 2016; Park et al., 2019). By contrast, the warm vertically homogenous state of the coastal ocean prior to the arrival of the storm inner core (i.e., the clearing of cooler bottom water from the shelf) eliminated this self-damping process associated with slower open ocean tropical cyclones. Despite this coupling of “weak” thermal potential in the coastal ocean state and slow translational speed, Hurricane Sally was able to rapidly intensify over the shelf defying the conventional open ocean expectations. Such unexpected behavior of Hurricane Sally demonstrates the critical need to better understand the importance of initial shelf setup and the direct air-sea interactions that regulate the feedbacks between the coastal ocean and tropical cyclone intensity. Without a better understanding of the processes that determine the onset and evolution of rapid intensification of tropical cyclones in coastal settings, society’s ability to develop the necessary resiliency to such events in a changing climate will be inadequate.

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